

## Decentralisation and civil society: negotiating local development in West Africa

Lachenmann, Gudrun

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Universität Bielefeld  
Fakultät für Soziologie

Forschungsschwerpunkt  
Transnationalisierung  
und Entwicklung



University of Bielefeld  
Faculty of Sociology

Transnationalisation  
and Development  
Research Centre

Universität Bielefeld - Postfach 10 01 31 - 33501 Bielefeld - Germany -  
Tel. (0521)106-6943 - Fax (0521)106-2980 - E-Mail: [tdrc@uni-bielefeld.de](mailto:tdrc@uni-bielefeld.de) - <http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/tdrc>

Gudrun Lachenmann

**Decentralisation and Civil Society:  
Negotiating Local Development in West Africa**

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# **Decentralisation And Civil Society: Negotiating Local Development In West Africa<sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract:**

The paper, referring to fieldwork i.a. in Senegal, challenges the concept of decentralisation by regarding the interface of knowledge systems at the local rural arena. It is asked whether there is a process of marginalisation of knowledge which had been acquired and generated these last years by peasant organisations and women's movements after the breakdown of the authoritarian development State. Applying an agency and gender perspective, it is asked how decentralisation is conceived of by various types of local and especially female actors – including the elected rural councillors – as access to development information from which they are again excluded and therefore obliged to renegotiate. On the other side, their conceptions and experiences of sustainable development including social and food security are devaluated and not made use of in newly designed blueprints of local development plans which are said to be elaborated by participatory procedures, thereby challenging good governance through interaction with other levels.

## **1 Introduction: negotiating decentralisation at the interface**

The paper, referring to own fieldwork in Senegal, Cameroon and Mali (as well as other research supervised) challenges the concept of decentralisation by regarding the interface of knowledge systems at the local rural arena (see Lachenmann 2004). It is asked whether there is a process of marginalisation of knowledge which had been acquired and generated these last years by peasant organisations and women's movements after the breakdown of the authoritarian development state. Applying an agency and gender perspective, it is forwarded that decentralisation is conceived of by various types of local and especially female actors – including the elected rural councillors – as access to development information from which they are again excluded and therefore obliged to renegotiate.

On the other side, their conceptions and experiences of sustainable development including social and food security as well as securisation of natural resources are devaluated and not

made use of in newly designed blueprints of local development plans which are said to be elaborated by participatory procedures. These are falling back with regard to former experiences of integrating livelihoods and technical innovation of cash crop production, protecting natural resources within a broad conception of local economy, in favour of an outdated public policy approach of infrastructural planning. Thereby economic subsistence and market activities are being pushed aside which had been integrated at least to some degree by self help projects and movements pursued within a kind of solidarity co-operation of external NGOs and a networking and institutionalizing selfhelp movement generated in the Sahel and West Africa region after Sahelian droughts (Lachenmann 1993).

It is argued that thereby good governance through interaction with other levels is jeopardized by raising the issue of vertical coherence and looking at concepts of participation and local management of natural resources, as well as the risk of capturing by technocratic authority. Concepts such as social forestry make one ask about which community is being constructed concerning the devolution of power, thereby hiding and reinforcing external interests and patron-client relations towards higher levels of society. This type of devolution of planning power might lead on the one hand to turning NGOs into simple service providers, and on the other to constructing local communities as ignorant with public spaces, which had been created, risking to disappear. The challenge is to bring central and local logics of agency together by creating spaces and arena for negotiation and change, instead of formalistic participation.

As one of the main challenges of decentralisation is the problem of transferring monolithic solutions, good governance through decentralisation has to show that it is really making diversity and pluralism possible, and not to bureaucratise development down to the “grass-roots”. It is about the power and capacitation (Amatya Sen) to re-define social problems and issues, as well as negotiative and shaping power between different levels in order not to enforce a ‘closed shop’ or ‘container’ planning unit but providing for trans-local and cross-level relations and interfaces for negotiation.

We should ask how civil society, through the new structures of local authorities created within the framework of decentralisation, can continue or even enlarge its influence on local politics?

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Does this power devolution from the central state re-enforce, as a mutually fertilising process, the space and autonomy acquired by civil society in the sense of empowerment? Or is there a capturing of the local population and neglecting of recent acquisitions? Decentralisation is (see Simon et al., eds., 1993; Thoni et al., eds., 2001) understood to be bottom down, comprising delegation and devolution of power, whereas empowerment would be bottom up, taking over power through agency. This would include power of definition (cultural - meanings, tradition etc.), regulatory power (political) as well as shaping power (social) – on the basis of new forms of popular modes of political action. The relationship between state and civil society can be looked at according to the deployment of creativity, visions and innovation.

Using an interpretative sociological approach in order to study social cohesion, an interactive, relational and dynamic perspective is crucial using the concept of the "interface" as introduced by Norman Long (1992) between different knowledge systems, logics of action and negotiation of meaning. It makes us pay attention especially to "encounters at the interface" and look at overlapping fields assuming that these are the crucial points where this new structuring of political, economic and social spheres can be understood. Thereby, collective political action and economic transformations are focussed in order to better understand complex and very diverse situations. An important point is to look from below at links to the political and policy system (vertical coherence) and to society in the sense of network society (social cohesion). Power relations are thereby operationalised in agency, authority, structuration and institutionalisation.

Thereby decentralisation can be studied as establishing the basis of good governance and overcoming typical structures of „bad governance“. At the same time, through agency, decentralisation should be studied to provide space for participation, local autonomy, democratic change and social justice. Civil society is not to be perceived as representatives of organisations, but as strengthening principles of public debate and creating multilevel arena, as interacting with the state and contributing to structuration of society / social cohesion. The political system, state administration and regulations are studied when interacting with civil society in different arenas.

Decentralisation seems, at the moment, to lead to a lot of insecurity what should be the right thing to do, with many different approaches in development leading to contradictions, but of course also opportunities for transformation. There can be seen chances to overcome authoritarian modes of governance (Mbembe 1988) and fill in deficits of articulation between differ-

ent administrative and political levels. The central question remains whether authoritarian forms might be coming up or, on the contrary, transparent negotiation become possible between different perspectives, looking for concepts and modes of local policy making and finding other softer and more flexible solutions to development problems.

Participatory approaches, followed in recent years by the development apparatus, risk to perpetuate the dichotomy of government–population in decentralisation. A populist approach might use simple conceptualisations in terms of opposed and uniform systems, referring to generalising abstractions, such as village, (traditional) community or ‘the women’ in the sense of “seeing like a state” (Scott 1999), thereby lacking methodological and social validity. Internal differences as well as relations and interactions, and the negotiation capacity between different groups and levels of organisation or with the external system are not taken into account. These problems have come up because decentralisation and self help approaches failed to look at the social and political context.

In order to create an enabling environment for good governance made up by creativity and flexibility through decentralisation, certainly a balance between formalisation as against new regulations and control mechanisms is required. In order for social movements and groups to become actors shaping decentralisation, a non-restrictive formalisation and recognition should take place, avoiding, however, the usual patronising and controlling forms of the bureaucratic state.

The case studies I am referring to which concern introducing development plans of local government and establishing co-ordination units for natural resource management in Senegal supporting civil society, social forestry in Cameroon based on traditional power structures, and social and economic embeddedness of decentralisation in Mali, show that serious problems turn up when putting into practice the new concepts of participation and community.

NGOs are often seen to represent civil society and social science expertise thereby avoiding basic debates on different sector policies and crosscutting issues (such as food security, environment), and participation becomes a populist concept perpetuating the dichotomy government – population, excluding women especially when formal decentralised structures including “traditional” ones are introduced or ‘reinvented’. There are changes of social, especially women's spaces, i.e. of the public sphere and the private, as well as new forms of organization on the local level, especially by women, and their translocal networking bridging various lev-

els. Within the framework of the ongoing transformation processes (Lachenmann 2001) there are newly emerging gender differentiated forms of interaction (interfaces) with regard to decentralisation, all forms of associations (including peasant organizations and NGOs) and democratisation. Empirical research provides us with a rather ambivalent picture, according to which newly established female modes of organisation and 'traditional' forms of political/societal representation are hampered through the ongoing formalisation of local power structures. The limited democratisation efforts with regard to multiparty systems and formal decentralisation and local administration tend to exclude women.

My thesis is that contrary to approaches to local arena being constituted through civil society movements and modes of co-operation, the institutionalisation of decentralisation does hardly provide the necessary fora for negotiation of the relevant social knowledge. Technical and technocratic knowledge, which indeed has often been accused not to be relevant but to construct the population as „ignorant“ tends to be marginalised, and policy issues on different levels are lacking vertical coherence.

## **2 Engendering decentralisation**

Decentralisation at first glance looks like being favourable for women, but it might be that more informal spaces of negotiating gender relations when becoming more formalised will further discriminate against women and bring the unequal gender constructs of the state down to the basis. With regard to civil society, in the sense of making the state accountable, ascertaining social embeddedness of the market etc., it is generally recognized that women are much less involved in the entanglement between state and economy, i.e. in the predatory, patrimonial and authoritative state, distributing mechanisms of enrichment and constituting patron-client relations as current form of articulation also concerning development resources. However, in some cases women's projects are used as the last strategic resource of the late development state to get some money distributed. The call for good governance should look into these structuring mechanisms.

On the other hand, it seems important to pursue an institutional approach, engendering e.g. the social organisation of regimes such as use of natural resources, social networks, looking at the construction of gender in institutions. This means introducing an intermediate level of analysis between micro and macro which would be necessary to better understand issues of decen-

tralisation in the sense of devolution of competence and resources, as well as of democratisation, and of problems of development and development co-operation wanting to get to grips with new concepts of state functions, citizenship etc..

Gender relations are crosscutting these relations. Often, access to land and to natural resources passes through relations of marriage and alliance which are translocal and going beyond territorialities. Women are not members of the re-constructed or 'invented' "traditional community". New forms of participation introduced by the state with support or pressure of the international donor community often do not take into account their old parallel power structure of representation, ignoring mechanisms which link female worlds and spaces with general power structures. Also, many other translocal relations are not taken into account, e.g. those constituted through migration processes and social movements becoming constituted in a translocal space and influencing local policies, or those linking big men to their economic privileges.

It becomes clear that often women and their activities have been representing the local (knowledge) and rural (grassroots) which therefore has been conceived in a very narrow sense. As soon as it gains attention in the process of decentralisation, there is the risk that knowledge and practice of social movements and the associative sector, in particular women, become marginalized. Their forms of association are always less formal and they contribute a lot to local infrastructure and communal caring economy through self help / voluntary work as well as collecting monetary and material resources on the local level. It might be that with decentralisation the power to influence the way how these local resources are employed dwindles more and more, given the fact that local tax and fee collection becomes formalised. Also knowledge and practices of female actors who have in recent years to some extent founded new arena and spaces for expression and transformation, might disappear once more. The question is, whether the silent disempowerment of women which had been brought about by many modernistic development projects and policies and sometimes turned around through gender policies, continues in decentralisation. Are women getting more fundamentally excluded as development policy moves to these new concepts meant to be more political and social?

Experience shows that while it might be interesting for women not to be too much put into a straight jacket of male, communal and state control, it is a fact that groups or co-operatives with mainly male members tend to be formal(ised), whereas women's groups tend to be in-



formal(ised). In Senegal e.g. men are mainly members in economic groups - GIE groupement à intérêt économique, women in Women in Development groups – GPF groupement de promotion féminine. The latter are captured by old experiences and culture of community development and home economics through established channels depending on Social Ministries subject to losing support after change of government. Also many local NGOs are very patronising in their “participatory” approach through which a lot of external finance passes. The fatal outcome is that everywhere we have local credit systems, mostly to do small trade, considered ideal for women to earn some additional income, and only slowly some forms of formalisation seem to take place through the strengthening of the local arena. At the same time they are excluded or not encouraged from activities which refer to new modes of access and management of natural resources, increase of agricultural productivity and new economic opportunities (such as upgrading of transformation of agricultural products etc.) in the local economy. This is even the case in fields of activities where women are normally active, often within a complex structure of gender co-operation and exchange. And this is also the case for their social and political activities.

A case in point is the example of three “women presidents” studied (by Franklin C. Odoemenam in 2004; Lehrforschung 2005) in a Rural Community in Senegal in the framework of rehabilitation and expansion of rice schemes which, according to the gender order, are being worked on by women (now also admitting young men), thereby enhancing food security by taking away pressure on rainfed cereal production by men. Each of them was considering herself to legitimately represent “the women” whereas one was co-operating with her group with the programme of bilateral technical co-operation, the other with a NGO and the third one with state services of women’s promotion. In this context the management of these collective economic resources seemed not to be included in the local administration and development planning. Also the example shows that these women groups are not politically represented in the local council in order to recognize regulations agreed upon. The question remains how can women's movements and women groups enter into serious debate about transformation in the framework of decentralisation.

### **3 Constituting social cohesion and security**

Since structural adjustment programmes SAP we have observed that community and especially women's resources, which are invested in embedding economic activities, are siphoned

off by formalisation of social security, cost recovery etc. Already a lot of fund raising has taken place on the local level, in traditional or 'neo-traditional' forms. Yet it has been mostly women who collect this money and who do the so-called voluntary or self-help work for providing basic services. Therefore the cost recovery as well as formalisation of basic services provision through local government becomes problematic. Questions of subsidisation between levels of service provision seem not to be discussed. On the contrary, in Senegal it has been observed in 2004 how a Rural Community was taught how to make a health centre viable by increasing fees without even discussing problems of access. Local development funds established by bilateral donors at the local level are not transparent as to their integration into the local budget and status of amortization.

Livelihoods are constructed through systems of social, including gender relations (Lachenmann 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001). Social security is constituted through systems of gifts and distribution, in permanent change (often uphold with a lot of effort by women). The local economy is characterised by a 'subsistence logic', with women taking as a priority and perspective livelihoods including household energy, water, including special orientation towards natural resources, such as collecting wood and other gathering products. These resources are now subject to new regulations at the decentralised level and a certain blockade as to bringing them from the social to the public level takes place.

The associative sector has proven itself to be the most relevant actor achieving social cohesion through institutionalising concepts of self help, food security, social security etc. within a de-territorialised, translocal space which is also structured through gender relations. Social and gender differences become more and more evident with, e.g., certain women acting as development brokers. Often women are very innovative in finding new forms of interaction with the local authorities and administration (e.g. different types of self-help forms of waste management in Mali), but the general problem to be exacerbated by decentralisation, of voluntary work and self help or professionalisation as well as access to knowledge, concerns mostly men. It has become clear that food security constitutes an important link between the political and economic field, including social entitlements, and at the same time it is necessary to look how modes of socio-economic transformation can be enhanced within these spaces through actors of civil society as soon as a meaningful co-operation takes place within decentralisation. Caring or community economy and services as a gendered structure (using Diane Elson's term for the economy) are organised very often through social movements and groups

and at present getting into conflict with new bureaucratic forms of resource mobilisation and budgeting in the frame of decentralisation.

After the near to break down of technical services in Senegal, depending on national Ministries, in many places local, so-called self-help groups or development committees had installed a kind of local administration, as e.g. peasant organisations in Senegal water supply etc. Especially with regard to gender policies, local and regional technical services (such as agricultural extension) have never been functional but reducing women to community development, animation etc. And new opportunities, e.g. by Social Dimension of Adjustment Programmes, are widely addressed to dynamic young urban men, public infrastructure, food for work etc., thereby crowding out women of their 'traditional' social community fields.

#### **4 Interfaces between local and state level**

It is necessary to look at state power relations – to be devoluted – and rural population, from a gender perspective, and spaces of production, negotiation and transfer of knowledge and interaction between different systems of knowledge as gendered structure. Only then one could overcome dualisms and open up new perspectives e.g. on the political and economic meaning and potential of decentralisation and democratisation efforts.

My thesis is that the present processes going on on behalf of decentralisation and strengthening of local government might mean that local structures and institutions are broken up and captured from above. This especially will take place on the back of the women, as they formerly had certain possibilities of co-decision making or even autonomous fields which might have been limited but were socially regulated. In formal so called democratic elections women are not integrated in a more or less equitable way, because the old pattern still is valid with women's influence passing through a kind of representation system. It is clear that they have problems to get on party lists. This means that democratic elections for communal bodies are crowding out women with regard to their say in communal affairs.

Empowerment, the concept forwarded in transnational women's policy, probably would mean in the first place that women can act in civil society and links between social spaces, public sphere and new political spaces implied in elected councils at the communal level should be established. On the other hand, mainstreaming, gender budgets are being discussed and intro-

duced by a lot of efforts between women's associations, focal points in technical state administration and donors. But on the local level, the WID approach is very simplistic.

In Senegal 'the women' of a community were constructed as an undifferentiated category and by authority made responsible for managing the special gift which the government had "given to the women" in the course of decentralisation, a "case-foyer", a nice looking, Arab architecture inspired building, mostly not in operation. This is a clear expression of the state's symbolic capturing of any female civil society, in continuation of the former capturing within the one-party system (as women's wing) as well as the supervision and control through one technical Ministry (of Women affairs etc., formerly community development etc.). It might be possible that this has been exacerbated – in a counterproductive way – through the process of preparing the Beijing Women's Conference and the so-called post-Beijing process, including the elaboration of National Action Plans. In 1997, I was able to observe that for the Women's Fortnight the festivities were used to applaud the President from the longstanding socialist party (overruled in the meantime during the last elections). It had been explicitly put under the slogan "Women and Decentralisation". But it was very clear that the central state tried to re-capture their associative structures and by strengthening the decentralisation process mobilise women for the regime. In the provincial town studied, the female president of the peasant organisation at the national level was jointly organising one of these public events / rallies together with the Women's Affairs Minister and regional Governor (see Diop 1995; Kaag 1999). So, the state is capturing in a very clear way – in general through foreign aid – the local development process by a socio-technocratic Women in Development WID approach. The continuity of the process has been observed as practices by the new liberal government (research in 2004; by Nadine Sieveking 2004 and 2005; Lehrforschung 2005).

One could formulate the hypothesis that the state is at present re-enforcing its hold over the population and augments its legitimacy through WID, exactly at a point in time when decentralisation produces a certain formalisation and homogenisation of the women's movement, a process running contrary to pluralism and diversity intrinsic in the idea of civil society and, in principle, also of decentralisation.

We have different approaches to look at present interfaces between local and state level which can be further developed for studying decentralisation and its implications for good governance. Decentralisation has to be scrutinized whether authoritarian modes of governance

(Mbembe 1988) can be overcome. Clientelism might be analysed as against networks and associative structures crossing all kind of spaces and creating new ideas etc. and civil society in a broad sense. But of course one has to treat the issue of clientelist structures which by definition transgress boundaries of communities with development brokers (Bierschenk, Olivier de Sardan 1998) acting at the interfaces. “Distributional coalitions” can be shown (following Olsen, Joanna Pfaff Czarnecka 1999) to cover networks between state officials, politicians, entrepreneurs. Mehrotra (2002) talks about “dense decentralisation” as against, I would say, technocratic or formalistic one, looking at quality of services and local power elite.

Therefore good governance can be qualified as overcoming these structures when establishing links between the political and the societal sphere, accountability, re-allocation of resources and social justice. At the same time, it should mean overcoming the technocratic problem, i.e. prevent the return of blueprints – such as community / district development plans, without taking into account processes, analysing the real situation instead of static shopping lists – in favour of green house (Hyden, 1990) /diversity approach. In Senegal, anyhow, there is a complete lack of coherence between the development plans recently elaborated by Rural Councils and those classically meant to be established by higher echelons of administration. In our study in 2004 we have been looking into processes of their elaboration observing a kind of technocratic overtake especially through local promoters, whose function is not officially foreseen, being trained by a donor supported programme in order to do surveys as well as funding applications – meant to take place in form of personal consultancy (instead of coming out of civil society or the councillors themselves).

In Senegal, the new decentralisation regulations and practice concern mainly land issues and are linked to natural resource management, as well as some infrastructure development, such as markets, including health and education. A critical issue of general importance, brought about by women’s movements on the national level, is the question whether women can own and inherit (agricultural) land. Collective access of women's groups to land and new economic opportunities often seem to be the solution, sometimes it can be negotiated, however formal attribution seems not to take place.

By the natural resource management project studied, as well as by other country wide projects called "literacy for rural councillors", mainly men are trained – as it is a fact that there are very few women elected. In one Commune, the four women counsellors (out of more than 30)

were extremely bitter as to saying that men were hindering women to become politically involved. None of them was member of a "hard core" commission, such as finance, environment, land etc. One of them was the former (first) President of the CR, coming from a noble family, one was an elderly woman from a village associated with her, one was the secretary of the Sous-Préfecture (administration), and one was "representing" the young women (i.e. rather following the old status concept). In another Community a woman councillor stepped out when her brother was supposed to become a member. Some women councillors become vice presidents of health or finance commissions; in general they are seen as representing (only) women's matters (Lehrforschung 2005).

The number of women who are knowledgeable about decentralisation and regionalisation modalities seems indeed very low. Therefore one can fear that women, who are so active in grassroots groups, can not continue to maintain their influence in present transformations as soon as the local regime is institutionalised, and they lose their spaces of public debate – constitutive elements of civil society.

## **5 Construction of community and closure**

Decentralisation is based on participatory development rhetoric, and implies the mobilisation of "civil society" as strategic resource coming to substitute itself when the state is retreating and the financial means of local collectivities are weak (René Otayek, in Point Sud 2002, p. 14). We have to question how do (former / present) approaches to participatory development connect with the concept of decentralisation. Participatory rural appraisal PRA and other planning methodologies have always been deficient with regard to reflections on social and democratic legitimacy (apart from methodological validity). On the other hand, within the framework of formal political representation, participation of civil society is often considered undemocratic. It is certainly clear, that there is a contradiction between the concept of participation regarding planning and projects as applied in development and new forms of political participation in newly established elected bodies, but they often do come from a social movement i.e. civil society background.

A typical case of constructing a closed unit as 'community' from above is that of 'social forestry' introduced according to recent development concepts, in many forestry legislations. According to its intrinsic logic, this approach conceives of self management of forest resources through the population, contrary to state forests and reserves, including a share of

revenues from the private sector. However, in most cases, authoritarian and predatory practices do not change. Contrary to translocal social and economic realities, these participatory approaches are constructing an idealised locality to which this local management idea is linked. These approaches necessarily lead to economic and political frustrations by not taking into consideration institutionalised modes of interaction and links with higher levels whose power positions cannot be addressed. Community tends to be constructed within the decentralisation framework, also by donors and even by translocal movements, in an essentialist way, not taking into account the translocal relations. Examples of development co-operation are social forestry in Cameroon, as well as other cases of neo-traditional institutions distributing / regulating access to economic resources and community development and co-ordination units for natural resource management in Senegal, including so called local conventions and group management of rehabilitated rice fields.

A neo-traditional community led by chiefs of different “classes” (stipulated by the colonial regime) is being constructed in Cameroon in the course of introducing social forestry with foreign co-operation. There is the risk that through its participatory or even populist and culturalist approach, a 're-traditionalization' might take place with the community being defined as the "indigenous population". On the other side, there generally is a new interest in “traditional conflict resolution mechanisms” regarding e.g. so-called immigrants or cattle holders. This is certainly an issue not to be resolved on this low level, on the contrary, conflicts can be seen to increase.

The question is, what concept of community is used, who belongs, who does not. How are gender specific forms of resource use represented, is there dependence on big men, from their lineage, family of origin, their husband. The concept of actors used, how is it defined, what idea of ‘representatives of villages’ is used, how are the local self-help groups defined with whom the co-operation is planned. There is high danger that a pseudo-traditional structure is institutionalised and used for a new, modern type of regulation (i.e. land right based on community forestry), excluding women from decision making and from seriously taking part in new economic opportunities, although women groups are involved in certain tree planting efforts on individual (of family) or group (women's and farmers') farms. Thereby, so-called traditional or culture specific gender relations are perpetuated in new societal structures and regarding new political and economic opportunities, not according to an autonomous social change which might include the negotiation of a new gender order, but with foreign donor

assistance. The local is constructed in a mono-gendered but contradictory way. On the one side the community has a male connotation, on the other side, as has been mentioned, in policy contexts, women and their projects represent 'the local'. Small activities are for women, new economic opportunities of some importance are for men, but often making use of 'traditional' structures.

The history of all kinds of land expropriation, collectivisation, groups, associations, co-operatives and their links / continuity with regard to decentralisation, privatisation, new forms of co-operatives, social forestry groups etc. are not taken into account. The question is how to refer to collective memory, tradition and identity without bringing in old cleavages. There is a long background of authoritarian modes of governance and control of agricultural production. Autochtony starts to become a big problem (Geschiere, Meyer 1999), possibly enhanced by decentralisation and community approaches, e.g. excluding so called strangers from access to land, as well as struggles over historical land rights coming up. The question is "to whom belongs the forest" (ongoing research by Friede Ngo Youmba on Cameroon).

The aim of traditional communities being re-constructed is to obtain social legitimacy. In Northern Mali old families (including colonial chiefs) are brought back to the local arena by various channels. There is a revival of conflict with members of socially inferior strata which often had been overrepresented in administration, needing to be very charismatic or forge alliance with a 'traditional upper class'. Nomadic populations have been pacified by providing infrastructure within the framework of decentralisation, like in Niger, having to treat with the legacies of colonial rule. Klute and von Trotha (1999) when looking at "administrative chiefdoms" in Mali talk about a process of "para-statalisation" of which decentralisation is part and parcel. On the other side, there is a fear of re-centralisation regarding natural resource use. Communes are meant to be the arbiter in mitigating between different groups regarding physical space, including "traditional authorities" without being able to create new forms of legitimacy (Dirk Betke in Point Sud, 2002). There is the modernisation of chief structure in Ghana with women claiming their own (Mueller 2002).

In Senegal, representatives of old families now appropriate land, in the name of some of their offspring, through privatisation / collectivisation for co-operatives / GIE, e.g. in irrigation schemes in the Fleuve region. In local councils, there is a more differentiated power structure (see also Blundo 1996) with, however, "politique politicienne" becoming very virulent with



mainly women denouncing this, as they are less involved. The everyday work of the local government is astonishingly often run by a clique of ‘friends’ of the president (research by Bertrand Zohy in 2004; Lehrforschung 2005), who either are the administrative secretary and his friends, but also who are selected amongst or given honorary positions of e.g. president of youth club etc. This has been especially observed in the – relatively rare case of a young president with quite some schooling, who, as he himself explained, become president by “converting” to the new party in power.

## **6 Bringing ‘development’ in through civil society at knowledge interfaces**

In some countries it is officially required for local government to incorporate “grass roots organisations” in deliberations and in service delivery. This means, with regard to social legitimacy, but mainly with regard to professional quality control, there must be higher level organisational and associative structures in which actors on the local level are integrated (as referred to in the case of Senegal). Then, there should be platforms, fora etc. on negotiation, but they have to crosscut different levels and to be part and parcel of the public sphere. The local level is too low ...

On the other side, some activists of the Senegalese peasant movement think that decentralisation leads to a certain undesirable politicisation, undesirable in the sense of not being oriented towards development but towards group interests. However, in our recent study (2004) we saw that a former peasant leader, after becoming councillor and “representing development” in the meantime had advanced to vice-president of the Rural Community. This position seems indeed to provide him with some space for change.

A decisive problem to be followed is how to attract attention to and create knowledge on local problems at the meso and national level, such as “famine in the villages” accused by the Senegalese peasant movement through media (in summer 1998) on which the government reacted in a not very efficient way through the old authoritarian administrative structures of sous-préfet (at district level). Food security is a crosscutting field where knowledge and concepts are completely different between actors. Up to this date, and although this needs the most decentralised approach possible (overcoming central mismanagement, mis-information, mal-distribution, speculation etc.) the state representative has always hegemonic knowledge. The ‘peasant leader’ community’s concept of food security goes against the official one, as-

suming that the imported rice on the markets at subsidised price would still be unaffordable - with their own cereal banks having broken down in most cases. The food security paradigm seems to have been subsided by the poverty paradigm (see Sénégal 2002 for Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, also Schaefer 2002) and – as a cross cutting issue – seems not to be addressed by Rural Councils, but regarded as NGO's business, as are the cereal mills often run by women groups and decisive for subsistence work and caring economy.

The decentralisation processes could be expected to produce more both way information flows, including on processes of impoverishment. How could it be that these types of knowledge would enter into a larger debate concerning decentralisation (local development) as well as regional development (which hardly exists as strategy) and poverty alleviation (Lachenmann 2003)? The local – state relationship is regarded by the rural population as being mainly a matter of knowledge, of information about the different possibilities and services offered by the state and international co-operation. This means that communes are mainly seen as points of getting information as well as access to public resources, and not of acquiring power regarding good governance, accountability, introducing alternative development concepts etc. It can therefore be regarded as a top down transfer of hegemonic state information, and not as the constitution of a space where the knowledge needed for agency is produced. This would integrate different logics – local knowledge as regards everyday practice, technical or situated knowledge, as well as (new) expert knowledge of a more generalised character. Within the framework of peasant organisations, through their leaders acting as brokers, the population had become quite knowledgeable in grasping these messages, but this direct link will become more difficult when localised.

Technical services, authorities and regional regimes do not seem in any West African country to be undergoing yet a serious reform process in order to be able to actively interact with the new local partners. As to economic / technical know how and competence, delegitimisation of technical services has taken place for some time, but now official rules of supervision, line etc. are often not yet clear, i.e. there is no devolution of power. There is certainly a legal pluralism and hardly any knowledge about the new solutions to be found and existing regulations which might overlap and become redundant. There seem to exist hardly any platforms, mechanisms or events to organise the necessary interaction between knowledge systems on different levels, such as observed e.g. organised in Senegal on a regional level by

the chamber of commerce and artisans (with external support) on regional public – private contracting, as well as regarding the expanding mutual credit schemes.

Can the planning techniques and knowledge be decentralised so that communities can process their own development plans? I think this is unrealistic and there is too much weight given in present development co-operation to decentralisation, as overall societal change and transformation, even poverty reduction, good governance and making development more political have turned out too difficult to handle. For following the regulations of local government and especially in order to have access to development resources, the communities need to have expert or professional knowledge – apart from the specialised knowledge on legal and administrative regulations and procedures. They do not have this knowledge. It is implied that they have to buy it (sic!), from consultants - private consultants or NGOs (they are said to be able to compete). There is no knowledge chain yet clearly established with regard to technical knowledge from state agencies.

As regards the technical know-how, in the Senegalese case, it has become clear that the communal level is certainly overwhelmed and professional services are necessary. One talks about “partnership” with the state services, as well as contracts regarding financial contribution of rural communes. This would be the institutionalisation which might be necessary, given the fear that the entities of co-ordination created crosscutting the official structure of decentralisation and regionalisation, might not be legalised by the higher levels of authority. On the other side, up to now it seems the bottom down financial flows do not yet occur and the dependence on donor money becomes higher and higher. The other side is the mobilisation having taken place in an informal manner as mentioned above and risking to be siphoned off to higher level formal systems e.g. of social security systems, water schemes etc..

This means that there are processes of closure; communes become closed systems, without transparency regarding individual actors being able to influence the local arena. We have to look not only at different levels but especially at translocal relations, knowledge exchange, negotiations and interpretations regarding what means decentralisation, including e.g. through different emigrants residing abroad. The question is whether movements and NGOs, given their loss of competence, are still able to be brokers of local and expert knowledge; can projects and externally funded programmes create the necessary arena for negotiation? Civil society forces had been initiating a debate on sustainable development, but who gives new crea-

tive inputs in local councils which define themselves to be regulatory, infrastructure instead of development policy orientated. Peasant organisations have already established necessary frameworks such as in Senegal Comité de Concertation des Ruraux CNCR which has now been involved in institutionalised forms of multilateral cooperation in a rather complicated, very slowly advancing para-public system of counselling of “producers”, in order to work with and represent their organisations (ANCAR ed. 2004). The former national president of the peasant association, however, who is now head of an NGO involved in this scheme, who used to be one of these charismatic leaders of social movements, is very pragmatic and is of the opinion that decentralisation is so to speak a force not to be hold back. It would be better to organise workshops at community level (their old instrument) in order to exchange ideas on issues at stake, and at the same time to link to higher administrative levels. He pronounces himself in favour of the idea of drawing up development plans on community level which should and necessarily would be based on activities initiated by peasant organisations, as there are no others. According to him, there would of course be the risk of going back to this old type of development plans which had nothing to do with local realities and concrete development policies, but it seems clear that the rural civil society is the only force which could seriously bring up these issues. The outcome is not yet clear at all, especially as the peasant movement has to a large extent lost its capacity of structuration on the middle level. Anyhow, it seems that with decentralisation it will be more difficult to negotiate concepts of development. It seems that NGOs will be more and more distanced from their origin of social movement, representing doubtful expert / local knowledge, following developmentalist codes including decentralisation jargon, and thereby lack any degree of autonomy of vision. Here I am thinking of the a.m. committees of Rural Councils, and the fact that (in Mali) communes are supposed to make use of consultancy firms and NGOs in order to be able to handle the new local knowledge. This will certainly influence the local structures of power and authority which are based on legitimacy of knowledge, i.e. their knowledge will be delegitimized.

It would certainly also imply risks when we think of the control to be executed through local political authorities – regarding mismanagement, appropriation of funds etc. With decentralisation, there will certainly have to come new forms of collective / economic instruments such as saving and credit systems, cereal banks, social security systems etc. which will have to find new forms of institutionalisation bringing together communes, associative sector, organisations and state services etc. However, new structures of co-operative banking, social security schemes initiated through the associative sector etc. , could represent a true change in the

logic of governance. The most important would be not to introduce new channels of control from the centre, but two-way interaction establishing connections to institutionalised networks which overcome the dilettantism often introduced through pseudo-participatory systems.

As a formal frame and administrative procedures as well as standardised planning and monitoring methods will be requested, the problem is clearly one of technocracy, meaning that formal knowledge will overrule political and social considerations and go back to blueprints and standardisation of criteria (see also Ferguson 1990). I.e. the local relevance of the knowledge to be applied, contrary to intentions, might be reduced once again. This had been represented by social movements, which had been networking starting from a local anchorage. They used to say “nous avons besoin de complices” / we need allies, referring to state and political (informal) representatives in different institutions. Is the term “partnership with the state” now becoming a formal institution legalising these former types of networking across institutions? Even more parallel structures and new rigidities come into place. But if the loose connectivity can be maintained, a lot of the dynamics and transformations might come about which had not been thought possible before.

## **7 Creating platforms for negotiation and exchange of knowledge**

The relevance of vertical coherence becomes clear as to new instruments of cross-cutting governance introduced after the abandoning of the blue-print centralised planning approach, such as environmental action plans, poverty strategies, pastoral codes, food security, even women action plans. The way these were put together in many cases I observed had nothing to do with lower levels' realities. What would be needed as an integral part of the decentralisation approach to foresee mechanisms and arena on or crosscutting different levels? These levels would not necessarily have to be defined as bureaucratic, authoritarian ones.

There are certainly suggestions (e.g. Keita in Point Sud 2002 for Mali) regarding the creation of spaces of exchange at the national and regional level by systematically making use of and learning from recent experiences, in order to solve problems. The most critical part is the idea that the state should be assuming a role of facilitator of the public debate who might ask others to moderate, such as territorial collectivities, NGOs, associations, even development projects. This is an approach of negotiation and agency, as against one of bureaucratic

legalistic control and authoritarian modes of governance. At present, I think, the communicative approach is, however, not winning (often contrary to what seems the case with the participatory rhetoric).

At certain occasions, the state puts forward the argument that rapid decentralisation e.g. might increase exploitation of natural resources, but it is clear it fears loss of control and revenue. At present, new forms of "local conventions" or codes, "fora of concertation" are being introduced e.g. in Senegal through development cooperation as intermediary or transitory institutions beyond or crosscutting the community level which however are very much struggling in order to get legally recognised by the upper administrative levels whose competence is not clear and thereby might be pushed into blockade.

I think it is a decisive question whether these will be channels of clientelist interests, controlled by the authoritarian state, or whether there is the chance that they will indeed constitute fora in order to enlarge the room for manoeuvre at the interface of different levels. Regarding the problem of structuration and cohesion of society by different actors and institutions, the Senegalese programme studied does indeed provide a framework of concertation and / or fora for negotiation which are highly necessary for decentralisation efforts, but certainly deficient in empirical experiences. I think that the creation of these arena will be the decisive point where it will become clear whether state and civil society interaction, structuration and integration of society and a new relationship between state and population will be created.

On the long run, these fora could become established as civil society or third sector institutions. All three different actors should be considered – village population with their self help organisations, rural communities as new democratic institutions, as well as state authority including services and regulations (e.g. forestry codes etc.). Thereby the condition of institutionalisation at higher levels than the local would be met and a contribution made regarding structuration between state, society and rural community through negotiation of knowledge.

Participation should not perpetuate – as is certainly mostly the case at the moment – the idea of opposed, uniform systems, such as village, community. But, what should be strengthened is the capacity to negotiate as regards different groups within, as well as with the surrounding systems. Decentralisation is based on the concept of territoriality. Communities might be re-

constructed as traditional and harmonious, in what can be called cultural and social closure. In times of de-territorialisation, trans-nationalism, global / local relations the focus in the form of approaches of place (Harcourt, Escobar 2002) locality, glocalisation could be helpful.

It would be necessary, given the high number of conflicts, to analyse and further develop models for conflict management and resolution, e.g. between pastoralism and agriculture, which are at the centre of interaction between state, economy and civil society. Once again, we have to take into account the multiple levels on which these problems are situated. But the only chance would be to grasp and address wide ranging problems at concrete points / encounters in a relational approach. Here the connection with ideas of good governance becomes clear in order to avoid a new practice of particularist distribution of land in rural communities, new patron client relations and of informal monetarisation with regard to all kinds of development resources.

Regarding gender, the issue of higher level institutions – not in the hierarchical sense, but networking on multiple levels - is addressed (GTZ 2001a, b), e.g. referring to models like associations of municipalities (Staedtetag) etc. It is certainly a big challenge to develop this kind of institutions which will constitute a bridge between hierarchical state structures and civil society. But is gender only brought in as an afterthought? Are all concepts which have recently been introduced with regard to agency and societal structure – such as good governance, civil society, accountability – overruled by structuralist and legalist systems which bring back what Hyden (1990) called “blueprints” in the form of development plans. Will there be a transfer of hegemonic knowledge top down and preclude new social spaces which had been constituted by social movements, providing space for change (Long 1992) and creativity and shaping power? Would new formalist democratic structures hinder the transformation of the authoritarian state? A two way approach is certainly needed with a public sphere, multilayered, enabling critical debate and exchange of knowledge, including the professional and research community.

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